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Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations

Culture of peace

Letter dated 13 February 2006 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Within the framework of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 54/37, entitled "Consideration of effective measures to enhance the protection, security and safety of diplomatic and consular missions and representatives", I have the honour to report to you hereinafter the measures taken by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, in connection with the establishments of the Embassies and consulates accredited to the Syrian Arab Republic, following the publication by newspapers in a number of countries of offensive drawings of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the measures taken in connection with the demonstrations of anger and protest against the publication of those drawings and the steps taken to deal with their consequences.

- A few days prior to the start of the demonstrations of anger and protest, the competent authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic took a number of anticipatory measures to strengthen the guarding and protection of the embassies and consulates, their members and members' places of residence, in particular the embassies and consulates of the countries where media published the offensive cartoons.

- Numerous demonstrations were held during the days that preceded 4 February 2006. Those who took part in them, who numbered in the dozens, peacefully expressed their protest and anger over the publication of the offensive drawings of the Prophet.

- On 4 February, a large demonstration was held. The demonstration began peacefully, its participants, who were estimated to be in the thousands, gathering in front of a building housing a group of embassies. The forces of law and order were increased immediately with a view to ensuring the security and safety of the accredited embassies. However, the peaceful demonstration suddenly turned to the use of violence, and despite the efforts made by the

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police and security forces, who tried with available means, namely tear gas, water hoses and the formation of a human shield, to prevent the demonstrators from approaching the embassies in question, and despite the appeals made by officials and spiritual leaders, some of the demonstrators managed to cause damage to a number of embassies.

- The use of force by some of those participating in the demonstration resulted in the injury of dozens of members of the police and security forces as they performed their duty of protecting the embassies, and a number of them were taken to hospitals to receive first aid treatment.

- The moment the peaceful demonstrations suddenly turned violent, the security authorities increased their presence and stepped up their security measures around all diplomatic and consular missions and places of residence of diplomatic and consular representatives. They set up barriers in all streets leading to the embassies which the demonstrators tried to reach after the outbreak of the acts of violence and turmoil and used water hoses and tear gas canisters to disperse the demonstrators and prevent them from approaching those embassies.

- The security authorities arrested and questioned those suspected of having caused damage to a number of diplomatic missions and legal measures against those responsible for causing such damage are currently being prepared.

- Telephone calls were made between the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Sweden and Norway, in which the Minister expressed his regret over what had happened. He pointed out that protective measures had been stepped up and reaffirmed Syria's commitment to and respect for international agreements. The Syrian Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs made calls to a number of ambassadors of States whose embassies had been damaged and to the Ambassador of Austria, whose country currently chairs the European Union, to express regret over the events that had taken place. He also assured him of the commitment of the Syrian Arab Republic with regard to international agreements and informed him that the conducting of the required investigations had commenced.

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic issued a press release in which it expressed its regret over the acts of violence that had accompanied the protest demonstrations on 4 February 2006, resulting in material damage to a number of embassies in Damascus. The Ministry added that, though the feelings of enormous popular wrath at the offences targeting the Prophet were understandable, it was not permissible to violate the rules of law and order in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed the obligation of the Syrian Arab Republic under the international agreements pertaining to the guarantee of security for embassies and their members. He stated that further measures had been adopted to guard and protect diplomatic missions and that there was no truth whatsoever to the existence of any threats aimed at nationals of certain countries in the Syrian Arab Republic.

- On 6 February 2006, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs met with the European Troika, chaired by the Austrian Ambassador and including the

Ambassador of Finland, the Swiss Chargé d'affaires and the Ambassador of the European Commission, also acting on behalf of Norway and Canada. The Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs met with the Norwegian Ambassador on 8 February and with a delegation from the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 9 February. During those meetings, the regret of the Syrian Arab Republic over what had taken place was expressed, as was its willingness to honour its liability for the damage that had resulted from the acts of violence, arising under international agreements, in particular article 22 of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

- A committee made up of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Damascus Governorate has begun its work of making an inventory of the damage and restoring the damaged embassy buildings with a view to satisfying the liabilities of the Syrian Arab Republic under international agreements. In addition, a temporary headquarters has been provided for the Chilean embassy.

- The Austrian Ambassador, whose country chairs the European Union, communicated with the Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs and thanked him for the security measures taken.

- The French Ambassador stated that the demonstrators tried to enter the French embassy, but the security and police forces succeeded in preventing them. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in France moreover, contacted the Syrian Ambassador in Paris to express to him its thanks for the security measures taken by the Syrian authorities to protect the embassy.

As we present these facts, it is regrettable that officials in one country, which has made it a policy to exert pressure on the Syrian Arab Republic and deliberately distort its positions, are ignoring the measures referred to above and issuing statements having no basis in reality. They have twisted the facts and misrepresented the measures taken by the Syrian Government, based on its commitment to international law and the performance of its obligation to protect diplomatic missions. This unfair campaign has been joined by newspapers and media known for the malicious, misleading stands taken by them.

The Syrian Arab Republic looks to the international community to do its duty in confronting the campaign against the symbols of the revealed religions, with a view to ensuring respect for all religions and their symbols, and to continue working towards a dialogue of civilizations and striving together to strengthen the spirit of tolerance among all peoples.

The Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic requests to have the present letter circulated among the States Members of the United Nations within the framework of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 34/37 entitled "Consideration of effective measures to enhance the protection, security and safety of diplomatic and consular missions and representatives". He also requests to have it circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda items 42 and 43.

(Signed) Fayssal **Mekdad**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative